

Salton Sea Species Conservation Habitat Project

Stakeholders Workshop

June 10, 2010

Selenium Workshop

A number of participants indicated that they are knowledgeable about selenium and would have liked to have participated in the selenium workshop that was held to obtain expert input on treatment technologies and management strategies. The general process of using experts and allowing discussions to take place without the public present was set up during the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program Programmatic EIR; however, if there is interest in having more participation in future workshops, the lead agencies will consider this possibility.

Action Item:

Distribute the technical report describing the results of the selenium workshop to the Stakeholders.

Goals and Objectives

The SCH goals and objectives were explained. The reason why a 2010 baseline was used for bird species was questioned given that extensive bird surveys were done in 1999. The 2010 baseline will be used because that is when the Notice of Intent and Notice of Preparation will be issued. The numbers of birds have changed since 1999, but the suite of species has not. The goal is not to restore conditions to those present at a certain period of time, but rather to target species at the Salton Sea whose populations are mostly dependent on fish.

It is important to indicate to the public what numbers of various species are expected to be supported by the proposed habitat. The objective should say "Provide appropriate foraging habitat for piscivorous (fish-eating) bird species habitat," not "adequate foraging habitat" because this doesn't carry a quantitative aspect.

A range of alternatives will be evaluated in the EIS/EIR, including a range of salinities. A decision has not been made regarding what the target salinity will be.

Control of fugitive dust would be an ancillary benefit of the project, not an objective. There may be other ancillary or indirect benefits of SCH, but SCH is not specifically being designed to achieve those benefits. It was noted that designing the SCH Project to control fugitive dust might increase support and could perhaps result in additional funding. The Natural Resources Agency has not made a final decision on whether the SCH Project is a Period 1 activity. If it is Period 1, then air quality perhaps should be included as a specific goal, but if it is strictly habitat under the Fish and Game Code, then

the current goals and objectives are appropriate. It is not known when a final decision will be made.

Standards will be developed as part of the adaptive management plan in order to allow the success of the Project to be measured. All relevant available information will be considered when developing the adaptive management plan; this will be the subject of a future workshop.

The SCH Project should consider opportunities to benefit pupfish, not just minimize impacts. A longer-term, larger restoration will need to consider this a central species. An explicit and transparent plan for managing the fisheries, including the targeted fish and invertebrates, will be developed and sent out for review by the Stakeholders.

Critical Screening Criteria

Potential locations currently include sites near the New, Alamo, and Whitewater rivers. The SCH Project needs to recognize that there may be multiple, potentially competing uses of the sites, including geothermal development. Geothermal issues will need to be addressed before the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) will turn over its lands; the two uses are not necessarily incompatible, though, and there could be some benefit to SCH from having geothermal present. It was suggested that not competing with other similar projects, such as a potential project around the Alamo River, should be an exclusionary or evaluative criterion.

The State's legal branch is considering water rights issues at the proposed SCH sites. Anything -200 msl and below falls under the agricultural repository definition established in the 1920s. Water rights in the State of California are not linked to exactly that elevation, however. The language describing the "fully appropriated" water rights for the Whitewater River says "to the Salton Sea." It does not define an elevation/altitude. For now, it is being assumed that water rights are available. If needed, the EIS/EIR will explain how the project would move forward without water rights or what process would take place to obtain rights.

The drains are not considered as a water source for the SCH Project because they have higher levels of selenium, are pupfish habitat, and the water is not regularly available. Pumping water from the Salton Sea or shallow groundwater also is being considered as a potential supply to achieve salt balance, although there are many logistical and water rights issues to be considered.

Land consolidation (45,000 acres) between multiple agencies (e.g., Coachella Valley Water District, IID, and the Bureau of Reclamation) is occurring in the north, reducing the availability of some lands. The State owns one piece of land in the north, which could be considered as a potential SCH site.

The areas around the deltas have been rich shorebird habitats, and the SCH Project needs to consider what will happen to these birds if the SCH ponds are located nearby.

Construction Challenges

Construction challenges that would occur under varying conditions were explained. The construction techniques that would be used also would depend upon factors such as costs factored in for possible maintenance, timeframe, etc. There is a potential to have functional berms before they are finished; ponds perhaps could begin functioning before the berms are finalized. There will be a future workshop on project design.

Other

The State will provide SCH website links and notes of the discussion to the Stakeholders and will create a meeting/workshop calendar on the DWR website (<http://www.water.ca.gov/saltonsea>).